

Hamilton Development Corporation
November 8, 2014

The Hamilton Development Corporation met at Hamilton Senior Center at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, November 8, 2014 with Brian Stein, Rick Mitchell, Anthony Nickas, Dave Carey, Bill Gisness present.

Call to order

Bill Gisness called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. There were approximately 30 to 40 attendees.

Fall planning session for the Hamilton/Wenham Village

Gisness summarized evolution of meeting from Master Plan in 2004, 2009 Cecil Group charrette, 2014 Hamilton Wenham Village plan. At all of these sessions new zoning by-law standards, new design standards, and infrastructure investment were discussed as what the Town needs. Wastewater treatment, bikeways, sidewalks, parking were identified as needed to support expanded uses in the Hamilton/Wenham district.

Recent activities that have happened in Town include creation of Hamilton Development Corporation to foster economic vitality in the Hamilton business district, and in 2013 HDC and MAPC conducted four meetings to draft a recommendation for downtown infrastructure. In 2014 HDC purchased one acre parcel of 59 Willow Street (Mr. McRae's single family residence) and 63 Willow Street (the old shoe shop building). The future of the site is to be determined by the community, land use boards, and Selectmen. Also in 2014 was the Wright Pierce wastewater management educational session. The HDC will conduct three planning sessions in the next couple of months to define what the Town wants in density and uses. The outcome will be passed to ULI for further economic analysis.

Today's meeting was educational for owners of property in the Hamilton/Wenham village district, abutters to it, and general public. HDC will make recommendations, foster discussion on design guidelines for the village area, and look at potential for 59/63 Willow Street. The December 6 meeting will focus on infrastructure improvements, parking, sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian improvements. The January 10 meeting will include review of outcome of previous meetings, review of design vocabulary, building consensus for what information should be passed on to Planning Board for review and comment and presented at Town Meeting for zoning by-law changes, and issue next steps. The purpose of the three meetings is to shape the

future of the village area of Hamilton/Wenham looking at height and density relative to development of design guidelines.

Discussion ensued about the businesses that are downtown and were downtown but have moved out relative to visibility, pedestrian traffic, and attractiveness. Trees were recently planted in the downtown, period lighting could occur, and consideration will be given to preferred construction materials to be used on buildings. There were no business owners but some Wenham abutters to the downtown area in attendance.

The HDC is looking at how to enhance the quality of life in a pedestrian environment in the downtown village district and promote mixed uses in the business district. The zoning by-law does not allow multi-family residential above a business use just strictly a business use.

Discussion was on the housing cycle for a healthy tax base. Hamilton currently has mostly single family houses. There is no housing for recently graduated, single young adults since they don't have the funding to buy a house so they are interested in more affordable housing such as apartments or condominiums. This demographic is interested in accessibility to train in downtown Hamilton to employers in Beverly, Salem, Boston or other areas along the train route. Hamilton is missing this demographic. In addition, there is no housing for empty nesters or senior citizens that want to downsize (i.e., apartments, condominiums, 55 plus). Wenham has the Maples and Boulders for senior housing. For a healthy tax base these demographics are essential because they do not have children in the school district, resulting in income generated from tax base without school expense.

The HDC is also looking at how to increase net tax revenue downtown. Feedback from businesses has been that there are parking issues (hard time finding spaces) downtown. The Master Plan, Cecil Group charrette, and MAPC study looked at area of Town from Asbury Street, Bay Road behind Winthrop School and Public Safety building, behind Hamilton shopping center, Enon Village, and up along and behind Pingree Park, down Linden Street to Willow Street.

Discussion addressed how the Hamilton/Wenham business district outlined in the zoning by-laws is area containing Willow Street, Asbury Street, Bay Road, Walnut Road and behind Hamilton shopping center and transitions in between MBTA parking lot and Enon Village and back down railroad tracks along Pingree Park and between properties that back up to Pingree Park and back down Willow Street. There are a lot of single family houses in the business district with part of the district going up Carriage

Lane and Bay Road. The Willow Street overlay district was also defined on Willow Street, Asbury Street, proximity to train tracks down to Willow Street office street complex. Discussion ensued about HDC's jurisdiction and impact relative to other groups in Town and Wenham. Reference was made to Town's zoning by-law that can be reviewed on Hamilton's website.

The currently allowed lot size in Hamilton is 20,000 square foot minimum with Wenham's being 40,000 square feet. In Hamilton, the lot coverage allowed is 75%, and Wenham's is 70%. In the business district there is a site plan review approval process. Setbacks include 25' front yard and 10' side yard in Hamilton while Wenham has 20' setbacks in side and rear yards. Allowed building height for both towns is 35' high. Parking in Hamilton is one parking space for every 300 square feet of office space, and one space for every dwelling unit, Wenham is a parking space for every 250 square feet of office space, and multi-family is not defined. Both Hamilton and Wenham do not require parking on a lot but parking has to occur within 200 feet of site. Some of the businesses along Railroad Avenue rent parking space near their site. Wenham allows 400' away. It was not known if parking requirements are enforced in Hamilton.

The current uses that are allowed in the business district for Hamilton include a residence similar to R1a or R1b district, retail store or service establishment, business or professional office, bank, restaurant or other place that serves food, municipal, state or federal government building, non-profit, civic, or fraternal building, public utility, parking area or garage for use of employees, customers, visitors under conditions specified under site plan approval, parking for other businesses. By special permit, a gasoline service station can be used provided repairs are limited to minor changes and adjustment and gasoline pump and equipment be located near where vehicles are serviced. As well as funeral homes, manufacture of products sold for retail, repair shop for automobiles, appliances and light equipment, automobile sales, adult entertainment use required by state law. Discussion ensued about controversy associated when former Mike's Auto wanted to sell used cars. Also, that the HDC purchased the Willow Street property to ensure what uses occur there relative to impact to area residents. The HDC is working to keep the downtown pedestrian friendly and Town's taxes low.

The current uses allowed under the Willow Street overlay by-law include: retail, restaurant, multi-family (number of residential units are not limited on site), mixed use residential/commercial (i.e., former Hansbury site). Discussion addressed how two businesses downtown have expressed interest in dwellings on a second floor, and that the downtown businesses were surveyed by the Economic Development Committee about eight years ago but it is likely the response data is outdated. Discussion was on if

a commercial property has residential units it could be more affordable to maintain when there can be tenant turnover in a retail space. The Community Package store has an apartment on the second floor and potential for another on the third floor. There are a couple of buildings downtown that have one apartment and a business use.

The Acord food pantry/Firehouse Place was a Chapter 40B project with four residential units and affordable. The multi-family use with commercial is not allowed under the zoning by-law. However, Chapter 40B projects can skirt the zoning. Discussion ensued about how a single parent with children could live in an apartment while it is likely that studio and one bedroom apartments and senior housing do not attract families and children. The student population in the HWRSD is going down so the district is working on a Master Plan relative to whether there are budget impacts related to numbers of children in the school system and student needs. The concept of a wide range of demographics in a community to keep the tax base strong with some residents not using all of the municipal systems was reiterated.

In the Willow Street overlay district special permits are required for projects where houses, setbacks, heights are similar to what exists now. Discussion ensued about how less than 2% of land in Town is reserved for business use. A second business district in Town was retired 30 years ago in the School Street side of Hamilton since it was determined to not be needed. Discussion was on why the downtown area is going to be changed with more density and higher buildings (potentially impacting property values in the area) and how this does not relate to Town's interest in preserving open space. Also addressed was how a balance is needed throughout Town and that young families were likely to spend more money downtown than older residents. In addition, that there was interest in the downtown atmosphere representing a New England village.

Discussion was on the importance of residents communicating to one another and Town officials about what they would like to see for development in the downtown. Also, that no changes would occur in the downtown until it is known what the Town will support. Discussion ensued about whether or not residents want mixed use in the downtown with apartments or condominiums over commercial space. There was mention of Canterbrook and Patton property 55 and over projects before the Planning Board that could possibly include affordable apartments with developers interested in paying money in lieu of including the apartments. This is because 55 and over projects do not work on the proposed development sites due to cost and income of residents needed for affordable housing. Also addressed was whether or not subsidies could be provided by developers for affordable housing at those sites.

Discussion addressed how Planning Board provides recommendations to the Zoning Board of Appeals that approves site plans. For the Cumberland Farms project, design guideline recommendations from the Cecil Group and MAPC were used in the development so a masonry rectangular building would not be constructed at the site. Discussion was on developers looking at market demand when identifying what to pursue including mixed housing types such as rural, suburban, and downtown urban.

A couple of downtown residents opined about Hamilton being noted as a desirable place to live due to “cute” downtown and that they are not looking for increased density and height. Discussion ensued about trying to control what happens in Hamilton downtown so commercial businesses are not the only result. As well as what exists now in zoning and what it does and does not control and what new zoning could or could not allow. For example, at the former Hansbury site now Dodge Tree, if any mixed use housing or commercial development were to occur there a special permit is required so the Planning Board controls what goes there. Also, what tools the community wants to guide what would go downtown.

Discussion reiterated that the HDC is listening to what the community wants and is suggesting apartments, condominiums, and over 55 housing for the downtown not affordable housing. Also mentioned was with the Willow Street overlay by-law the height allowed is 35’ but it could be increased with special permit. Parking stays the same, and there is potential for shared parking with a business and residential use above where a car is parked for business during the day and at night a car is parked for residential use.

Images of Hamilton were presented including new renovation of Timeless Interiors building with dance studio on second floor and dormers added to the building. The third story is not used in this building that is 30’. Definition of height was explained with 35’ for flat roof with three stories, and gabled roof with mean height. The Community Package store has retail below, apartment on second floor, and unfinished residential on the third floor. This store and the Talbot’s store have gabled roofs with main entries of off Bay Road facing parking area. Guidelines were presented on towers, turrets, mansard and gabled roofs, types of windows and exterior materials (i.e., wood clapboard and paint colors) for public consideration. Also addressed was whether or not structures on Railroad Avenue should remain one-story as well as setbacks. An image was presented of Acord Food pantry building with its mixed business and residential use. Other design guidelines presented for consideration were sidewalks, entries of buildings and use of planters.

Discussion was on MAPC's recommendations for the Town as a guideline, the lack of control that the Town currently has in the downtown (i.e., traffic cones at turf business at the former Mike's Auto site that was previously functioning as used car lot permitted by Selectmen). Also mentioned was that other uses such as restaurant or bakery could not be done at former Mike's Auto site until there is a septic system in the downtown. Discussion addressed how Selectmen, Planning Board and ZBA all weigh in on what occurs downtown. So focus should be to identify what the Town wants in the downtown village area and what can be done working with these Town boards.

Discussion ensued about give and take that occurred when Hamilton shopping center was expanded including traffic flow from parking, installation of fences, and use of parapets to screen noise from equipment, and clapboard was used to benefit the communities and abutters. Also that commercial uses could be done on Willow Street along with pedestrian friendly establishments on the street front. Review was done of some of the Wenham building vocabulary in the business district.

Analysis was done on zoning by-law and allowed size of construction (i.e., on a 3,200 square feet 40' wide by 80' deep so 2,400 square feet could be built with 800 square feet in back and eight cars on property) and impediment due to lack of space for parking in the area. There was mention about how to make walking in the downtown more pleasurable would be addressed at one of the upcoming sessions.

Discussion ensued about how the HDC is sensitive to whether or not downtown residents and abutters to the downtown are interested in development. Also if there would be a safety issue for children if traffic increases in the downtown area due to development. In addition, that the merchants do not want to fund a downtown septic system facility. The Town would likely have to fund it through the tax base or other mechanism.

Discussion was on review of HDC's modeling images of the downtown area from existing based on what is allowed by zoning and what could happen with buildings added (i.e., anchor building on the corner) and if some were at 35' height in business district (i.e., 10' floor to floor with gabled third floor). It was noted that the building where the Black Cow is located is 22' high. Also, that 35' is the allowed height for residential.

Discussion addressed septic and parking limiting what could happen in the downtown now. Images were shown if solutions were found to these limitations relative to what type of development could occur in the downtown based on current zoning illustrating

need for zoning control. For example, the McRae property could have been purchased and developed with a large septic system, parking lot and building. Also noted was whether or not open space has to remain by bank at the entry of Railroad Avenue at Bay Road or is there potential for an anchor building at this site.

Discussion addressed Cecil Group study and suggested parking off of Patton Park, next to railroad tracks, adjacent to former Hansbury property, parking near the former McRae property, parking near MBTA and gas line. Also pedestrian walkways off of the gas line to the downtown. Highlights from the study include: if Wenham property along town line becomes available for reuse, mixed use development could be encouraged with a buffer of green space along Route 1A; encourage visitors to explore all of Hamilton's options with signage improved along Railroad Avenue and 1A; from Mobil station and back addition of mixed use near Linden Street and 1A; area on Willow Street and Railroad Avenue and reuse of McRae property could be a neighborhood park, housing, parking or retail shops; improve streetscape along 1A and Railroad Avenue to create a more inviting environment (trees have been planted along Railroad Avenue); create a more functional parking system in the neighborhood between 1A and Willow Street by improving layout of parking lot to enhance traffic flow and encourage more business patrons; enhance pedestrian and vehicle circulation with through block links; create a walking and bike path adjacent to the railroad tracks to improve connections to downtown and improve larger pedestrian network; improve streetscape and encourage additional commercial use along the northern end of Willow Street near Asbury Street; improve pedestrian safety with crosswalks at Asbury Street and Bay Road; resolve parking problems with creation of deck at MBTA lot; improve landscaping at Hamilton crossing; possibly add shops at the corner of Walnut Road and 1A to provide continuity to retail options along 1A (new crosswalk will be put in relative to Cumberland Farms); create a walking path along utility easement along Walnut Road to bring people downtown; reuse old library for Senior Center; reuse Winthrop School for mixed use and housing. These items will be reviewed at next two sessions to fine tune uses.

Discussion addressed HDC's purchase of the McRae property last spring and interest from potential purchasers to make the site financially viable with a retail component and a 20 to 24 apartment/condominium (1 to 2 bedroom unit) structure on the property. Review was done of a potential building sized 65' by 160' to get the units, couple of retail spaces, and 20 to 30 parking spaces on the site. There is a parking lot at the back of the property and four good pedestrian entries to the property. The back of the Timeless Interiors building could be enhanced, green space added for a walking area, and Town parking lot enhanced. A wastewater treatment system would be used for this building

as well as others in the area and be located under parking. An attendee suggested that parking for the proposed new building could be used for more than the residents. Abutters to this potential building expressed concern about need to represent three houses on the model image, change of use in area, high water table in downtown and low area of McRae property where water collects in rain events and how drainage would be addressed on site. It was noted that if a developer had purchased the McRae property there would be a lot less opportunity for input on development than having HDC controlling the future use of the parcel.

Discussion reiterated purpose of the meeting to educate attendees about zoning by-law in the village area from Bay Road to Willow Street to Linden Street and to understand impact. Also addressed was if there was any interest in mixed use in overlay area related to Pingree Park in Wenham. Discussion with an abutter addressed that person's concern about how potential changes could modify character of residential neighborhood, need for design standards, and lower density consideration.

Discussion addressed how the next session on December 6 at the HW Library will contain summary of attendee concerns and previous meeting outcome, and will look at parking, sidewalk, uses that are wanted or not, heights, pedestrian improvements and beautification. At the Saturday, January 10 meeting, the HDC will start drafting by-law and design guidelines. Feedback from some attendees was that HDC was trying to listen and move forward based on input. Discussion summarized that attendees were interested in uses downtown and need for conversation on mixed uses, and height (which perhaps should be dropped), density and how much more retail would be supported, need for housing for young single adults and senior citizens, as well as emphasis on pedestrian environment that would not draw more cars into Town.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Jane Dooley, Minutes Secretary

ATTEST: _____
Clerk